

Iraq recaptures Nimrud, home to ancient site

AFP, Baghdad
The Iraqi military yesterday said that soldiers south of Mosul have recaptured the Nimrud area, home to the site of an ancient Assyrian city that was blown up by the Islamic State group. "Units of the 9th Armoured Division completely liberate the Nimrud (area) and raise the Iraqi flag over the buildings," Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) said in a statement quoting a top military officer. The JOC did not specifically mention the Nimrud archaeological site, which is located a little over a kilometre (less than a mile) west of the village that bears its name.

Iraqi forces seeking to drive IS from second city Mosul also retook another village southeast of the site of Nimrud, which was founded in the 13th century and was one of the great centres of the ancient Middle East. The city became the capital of the Assyrian empire, whose rulers built vast palaces and monuments that have drawn archaeologists from around the world for more than 150 years.

In April last year, IS posted a video on the internet of its fighters sledgehammering monuments before planting explosives around the site and blowing it up. It was part of a campaign of destruction by the jihadists against heritage sites under their control that also took in ancient Nineveh on the outskirts of Mosul, Hatra in the desert to the south and Palmyra in neighbouring Syria.

IS casts its destruction of artefacts and historic sites as religiously mandated elimination of idols, but that has not stopped it from selling smaller items to fund its operations. It is unclear what still remains of Nimrud's ancient ruins.

Many of its monumental stone sculptures and reliefs were taken away for display in museums around the world but some of the more massive structures remained in place when the jihadists swept through in mid-2014.



ANTI-TRUMP PROTESTS RAGES ON IN US People gather outside a federal building during a march and rally against the election of Republican Donald Trump as President of the United States in Los Angeles, California, Saturday. Demonstrators across the United States planned to take to the streets for a fifth straight day yesterday as the president-elect sparred on social media with one of the nation's largest newspapers, the New York Times. PHOTO: REUTERS

Will fight graft at risk to life

Indian PM vows more anti-graft projects, seeks 50 days time

AGENCIES

After demonitising high value notes to curb black money, Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday said he has "more projects" in mind to rid the country of corruption and was ready to face the consequences as forces are "up against me" with their 70 years of loot being in trouble.

"This is not an end. I have more projects in mind to make India corruption-free. Cooperate with me and help me for 50 days and I will give you the India you desired," Modi said after laying the foundation stone of Mopa greenfield airport and launching work on electronic city project in Goa.

"We will take action against 'benami' property; This is major step to eradicate corruption and black money ... If any money that was looted in India and has left Indian shores, it is our duty to find out about it," he said.

Modi surprised the country Tuesday night when he announced that 500 (\$7.50) and 1,000 rupee notes would no longer be legal tender, in a design to tackle widespread corruption and tax evasion. Customers can exchange their old bills for new ones or deposit them in

their accounts until December 30.

But even after five days of the announcement, desperate people continued to line up Sunday for hours outside banks and ATMs, with many running out of cash by the afternoon and prompting anger against the government's latest anti-corruption measure.

"People are going through great pains. I feel that pain. This scheme is not born from arrogance. I have seen



such adversities up close. I understand the trouble everyone is facing," Modi said at the event.

"I know that (some) forces are up against me, they may not let me live, they may ruin me because their loot of 70 years is in trouble, but I am prepared," Modi said in a speech which saw him getting emotional a few times.

Referring to the criticism of the demonitisation move by opposition

parties, he said "they thought if they pull my hair, I will do nothing. But even if you burn me alive, I am not afraid."

Revealing the efforts behind the demonitisation move, the Prime Minister said it was "a secret operation I started 10 months back and had formed a small team."

"It was of course not the one like (Defence Minister Manohar) Parrikar had launched (surgical strike in PoK). We had to print new currency notes and take other steps."

Appealing to the people to bear with him for 50 days (till December 30), he said "if you find anything wrong with my intentions or my actions, hang me in public. I promise you I will give you the India which you desired."

Since coming to power in 2014, Modi has pledged to crack down on so-called black money -- vast piles of wealth kept hidden from the tax authorities -- with new measures including 10-year jail terms for evaders.

Analysts have broadly welcomed the latest initiative, saying consumer spending would likely dip in the short term as the new notes made their way into circulation but that the move would boost GDP in the long term.

Dozens more killed in Rakhine unrest

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's military said 28 insurgents were killed during renewed clashes in western Rakhine state yesterday following a palpable uptick in violence in the strife-torn region.

In a statement published online the military said 22 attackers armed with swords were killed near Dar Gyi Zar village after they charged at soldiers, adding another six insurgents were killed during clashes elsewhere in the state.

Northern Rakhine, which is home to the Muslim Rohingya minority and borders Bangladesh, has been under military lockdown ever since surprise raids on border posts left nine police dead last month.

Soldiers have killed several dozen people and arrested scores in their hunt for the attackers, who the government says are radicalised Rohingya militants with links to overseas Islamists.

Meanwhile, new satellite images released by Human Rights Watch yesterday showed hundreds of buildings in Rohingya villages have been torched.

Their analysis showed more than 400 buildings torched in three Rohingya villages where the fighting has been taking place. The group said active fires and burn scars showed that most of the destruction was caused by arson. The latest images were taken on 10 November.

Brad Adams, the group's Asia director, said the new photos showed "widespread destruction" that was "greater than we first thought".

"Burmese authorities should promptly establish a UN-assisted investigation as a first step toward ensuring justice and security for the victims," he said in a statement.

US ELECTION

Trump to live part-time in White House!

NDTV ONLINE
Donald Trump may not live in the White House full-time after assuming the US Presidency in January and is discussing with his advisers about splitting his time between Washington and his penthouse apartment in Manhattan, a media report said. Trump's advisers say he might spend most of the week in Washington, much like members of Congress, and return to Trump Tower or his golf course in New Jersey or his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach on weekends.

Farage meets Trump

AFP, London
Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage has become the first British politician to meet with Donald Trump since his US election win, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) confirmed late Saturday. The US president-elect hosted the euro-sceptic leader at his New York residence Trump Tower where they spent over an hour discussing the Republican's "victory, global politics, and the status of Brexit", according to a UKIP statement.



Marine Le Pen eyes French presidency

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK
French far-right leader Marine Le Pen has declared that after Brexit and Donald Trump, her victory in French elections is the next step in the political wave sweeping the globe. National Front leader Marine Le Pen has led a number of polls ahead of next spring's French presidential election though she is not expected to win. But speaking to the BBC's Andrew Marr, Le Pen was asked what would come next after Brexit and Trump's win. She said: "Marine Le Pen being elected French President."

France marks one year since Paris terror attacks

AFP, Paris

France yesterday marked the first anniversary of the Paris attacks with sombre ceremonies and painful memories for the relatives of the 130 people killed.

President Francois Hollande unveiled plaques at sites across the city that were attacked by the Islamic State jihadist group.

The first was at the Stade de France to commemorate Manuel Dias, 63, who was killed by a suicide bomber outside the national stadium as France were playing Germany in a football match, starting a series of coordinated attacks on the evening of November 13, 2015.

Hollande and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo then unveiled plaques outside bars and restaurants in the trendy neighbourhood where gunmen sprayed bullets at people enjoying a Friday evening out.

The final ceremony took place outside the Bataclan, the concert hall where 90 people were killed by three attackers during a rock gig.

The names of those killed at the concert were read out as hundreds of people gathered under rainy skies watched in silence.

Islamic State said it had struck at France because it was bombing its militants in Iraq and Syria.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls yesterday said the state of emergency declared after the attacks would likely be extended as France gears up for presidential elections in six months' time.

A year on, 59 percent of French people say the attacks have changed forever the way they view life and a similar percentage still feel "angry", according to a poll in Le Parisien newspaper on Sunday.



Pakistani residents mourn the death of relative who was killed in a suicide bomb attack on the shrine of Sufi saint Shah Noorani in Karachi, yesterday. At least 52 people died and more than 100 others were injured on Saturday in the blast officials said, with the Islamic State group claiming the attack. PHOTO: AFP

Safety pins: a pointed show of solidarity

AFP, Washington

People have long used ribbons, flowers, colors or badges to symbolize political causes, from the carnations of Portugal's 1974 revolution to the orange ribbons of Ukraine's 2004 revolution to the gel wristbands now worn to promote almost any charity.

Enter the lowly safety pin. That humble but practical device is fast gaining a higher profile, as growing numbers of Americans wear the metal fasteners to show solidarity against intolerance after the election of Donald Trump.

The safety pin -- invented in 1849 by an American mechanic who needed money to pay off a \$15 debt -- uses a cleverly designed clasp to protect users from its fiendishly sharp tip.

And that is the point. In the days since Trump's election, people have begun placing a single pin on their shirts to convey a message of support -- of safety, and protection -- to minorities, women, immigrants and others who may feel threatened by the strident rhetoric that carried him to the White House.

Since Trump's upset win there has been a reported uptick in reports of racist and xenophobic incidents, fueling fears for the period ahead.



Clinton blames FBI for loss

AFP, Washington

Hillary Clinton on Saturday blamed FBI director James Comey for her loss in the US presidential race, claiming that re-opening the probe into her email use broke the momentum towards victory.

Clinton told fundraisers and donors in a conference call that Comey's two letters to Congress on the probe had tilted crucial states towards Republican Donald Trump, US media including Quartz and CNN reported.

"There are lots of reasons why an election like this is not successful," Democrat Clinton told her national finance committee, a person on the call told online magazine Quartz. "But our analysis is that Jim Comey's letter raising doubts that were groundless (and) baseless -- and proven to be -- stopped our momentum."

On October 28 -- less than two weeks before Election Day -- Comey dropped a bombshell by informing Congress the FBI was looking once more into Clinton's controversial



US ELECTION 2016
Britain, France skip EU special talks on Trump
Nato chief warns US against 'going it alone'

email practices as secretary of state after new messages were uncovered.

His second letter, on November 6, just three days before the election, stated that the FBI's review of the new emails had uncovered no wrongdoing, and that the bureau had not changed its July recommendation not to charge Clinton.

While the first letter reopened old wounds and reminded voters of the

controversy, the second letter, according to Clinton, had the perverse effect of energizing rival Donald Trump's base, Quartz reported.

Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers were to hold special talks yesterday on Donald Trump's stunning US election win as Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg warned bluntly of the dangers of American isolationism.

But the talks were to take place without the foreign ministers of Britain and France, apparently reflecting their concerns about over-dramatising European fears.

The meeting takes place amid a surge of anxiety sparked by Trump's campaign-trail rhetoric, which questioned the seven-decade-old US commitment to Europe.

In an article in Britain's Observer newspaper on Sunday, Nato Secretary General Stoltenberg warned: "We face the greatest challenges to our security in a generation."

"This is no time to question the partnership between Europe and the United States," he said. "(...) Going it alone is not an option."

Australia to resettle refugees in US

AFP, Sydney

Refugees held on remote Pacific camps after trying to reach Australia by boat will be resettled in the US in a "one-off" deal, the premier says, a breakthrough that could see the controversial facilities closed.

Canberra sends asylum-seekers who try to reach Australia by boat to detention facilities on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island and Nauru. They are blocked from resettling in Australia even if found to be refugees.

"The arrangements with the United States will offer the opportunity for refugees, both on Nauru and Manus, to be resettled," Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told reporters in Canberra.

FARC, govt strike new peace deal

AFP, Havana

Colombia's government and Marxist FARC rebels on Saturday announced a revised peace deal to end 52 years of armed conflict, after voters rejected a prior peace accord in a referendum.

"We have reached a new final agreement to end the armed conflict, which incorporates changes, clarifications and some new contributions from various social groups, which we have gone through one by one," said a joint statement read out by diplomats from Cuba and Norway, the peace process guarantors.

Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos stressed that the new peace deal "is a better agreement."

The modified agreement leaves intact the accord's major tenets, including the FARC laying down its arms and becoming a political party. However, it includes a number of "innovations" to several of the key points in the original peace deal, according to the government's lead negotiator Humberto de la Calle.

The new accord was fine-tuned after the groups that opposed the original deal submitted proposed changes as starting points for negotiations.

Santos acknowledged that a suggestion seeking to bar rebel leaders involved in serious crimes from elections was not part of the re-worked peace deal. He also hinted that the new accord would maintain the provision that FARC rebels could avoid prison time by confessing and carrying out acts of reparation to victims.